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PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

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Youth Suicide Prevention Campaign Aims to Restrict Access to Methods

Startling rates of attempted and contemplated suicide among youth have prompted the South Central Idaho Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN) to develop a campaign to inform parents about how to restrict access to deadly methods of suicide. With a grant from the Governor's Executive Office for Families and Children, South Central Idaho SPAN is launching a media campaign using radio, billboards, and the Internet to give parents ideas about how to protect their children.

According to the results of the 2005 Idaho Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 16% of all Idaho high school students seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year and 15% said they made a plan for how they would attempt suicide. Among all Idaho students, 9% report having actually attempted suicide in the previous year.

Nationwide in 2001, the most common methods of suicide among youth were firearms, suffocation (hanging), and poisoning.

"In 2001, guns were used in 54% of youth suicides," said Cherrell Jacobsen, Twin Falls County Chief Deputy Coroner. "And most youth suicides occur after school in the teen's home. Both of these situations can be corrected."

Guns are the most widely used means of attempting or committing suicide. In a 2005 firearms study, 48% of households with guns did not have them locked up, 22% were loaded, and 5% were loaded and accessible.

Most children older than the age of 7 have the strength to pull the trigger of a firearm, especially a handgun. Parents should keep guns unloaded, locked with a child-safe lock (free or low cost at most law enforcement agencies), and stored with ammunition in separate locations.

"Using drugs and medications is another common method of suicide among youth," said Cherrell Jacobsen. "Parents can prevent access to dangerous medications and household toxins by keeping them locked up. Parents are also encouraged to communicate with physicians so that medications prescribed to youth are effective but not deadly when treating potentially suicidal patients."

There are several factors that can greatly limit the possibility that youth may attempt suicide. Parents are encouraged to seek effective clinical care for mental, physical, and substance abuse

disorders, as well as offer family and community support. Youth often benefit from training in nonviolent methods of handling disputes and conflict resolution. And cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation instincts can play an important role in helping youth choose positive options to solving problems.

Billboards can be seen in four south central Idaho communities, and radio spots will be playing on several local stations during the months of March and April. A free brochure will also be available on the SPANIdaho website at www.SPANIdaho.org. For more information, contact Susie Beem at South Central District Health, 737-5946.

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